

**KOWA YA SHA KIDA**  
**EVERYONE DRINKS THE DRUMMING**  
**[Everyone Likes his Praises Sung]**

The Author's Introduction

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Translators' Note: This article is an example of fine Hausa prose. The translators are well aware of their shortcomings in rendering Hausa style in English. We accept full responsibility for deficiencies in the English style or for any other faults of translation.

It is important to note that this piece was written as an introduction to a book about Hausa drumming and was not meant as an article in and of itself. For this reason some of the references in the introduction to the book will not be available to the reader. It does, however, give the reader a sense of what issues are being discussed in Hausa folklore publications, an opportunity rarely available to non-Hausa speakers.

The author has kindly granted his permission for this translation.

Songs are important in explaining the Hausa way of life and its wisdom; because of this, those who study the Hausa language include songs among the genres of Hausa traditional literature. They characterize this literature as traditional because it is something the Hausa have made themselves and not something another nation has come and taught them.

It is thought that human beings started to use drumming when they began to hunt for food. When people began warring among themselves the occupation of drumming gained in importance. Although this is thought to be the origin of drumming in the world, there are different opinions regarding the origin of Hausa oral songs. Three explanations on this subject follow. The first explanation: if you ask most Hausa praise singers about their origin, they always say that they are the descendents of a man called Sasana. Sasana was the singer of the Prophet (may God's trust be with him). Later, some of his children migrated towards Hausaland. As to this explanation, if we look at Islamic history then we will see that in fact there was a singer of the Prophet who was called Hassanu, the son of Sabitu. He was originally the singer of a tribe in Medina. Later when the Prophet migrated to Medina, this singer repented, entered the Moslem religion, and became the Prophet's singer. This is satisfactory, except that there is no historical evidence that shows that there was ever a singer who migrated from Arablands to Hausaland. I therefore believe that this explanation was given because of the Moslem influence on the minds of the Hausa. (1)

The second explanation: It is believed the Hausa got drumming and singing from the old African empires of Mali and Songhai. It has been established that the Mali empire had court drummers. Later, when they conquered Songhai, the Songhai acquired this kind of drumming. Under King Askira, the Songhai government was extended until it reached certain of the Hausa lands. As a result, some of the Hausa rulers saw and became familiar with this kind of drumming.

This explanation, however, is not completely convincing because history also shows that even prior to the time of Prince Kanajeji of Kano (1390-1410) dundufa [a kind of long narrow drum] was used in Kano. (2)

The third explanation: they say that the Hausa, like the rest of the nations in the world, began drumming in conjunction with hunting. At that point there was warring between the Hausa themselves and between the Hausa and the surrounding peoples. When they went to war, some of them would stand on the side to encourage the rest of the warriors, boosting their morale and driving away the enemy. The prince continued to reward these encouragers because he saw the influence their exhortations had on the warriors. It is said that under the impetus of these rewards the encouragers improved their verbal art until it became like a song; they then joined it with the drum. This explanation continues on to say that, even in times of peace, the drummers continued to go to the houses of those who had been brave in war or hunting whenever there was a happy occasion such as a wedding or a naming ceremony. The drummers reminded them of their bravery on the field, and expressed the hope that Allah would make their children as brave as they had been. After the death of these brave people, the drummers continued to sing the praises of their past acts of bravery to their children. It is said that this is how Hausa drumming came about. The drummers continued to develop drumming until they brought it to its present state. This third explanation about the origin of Hausa drumming is more plausible because it conforms to present day Hausa custom, especially in regard to the drumming done at marriage and naming ceremonies.

Most of the drummers are part of a group which consists of the leader, i.e. the singer (if it is a woman, she is called a zabiya or female guinea fowl) and the chorus. Chorus members can be divided into three subgroups: there are those who help with the closing of the song, those who only repeat what the singer has said, and those who only repeat the refrain of the song, as will be seen in the second category of drummers' groups.

As I explained before, singers enhance the pleasure of their songs by accompanying them with the drum. The drums are also divided into different groups as will be seen in the first category of Hause instruments. Most of the drummers make use of a lot of instruments at the same time except for Kuntigi players, the majority of whom play only one Kuntigi [a one-stringed plucked instrument].

The majority of drummers wear traditional clothes when they sing. Today some singers have their helpers wear identical outfits (such as a shirt or pants or a hat) whenever they perform. Examples of this are Kalangu players [talking drums or hourglass pressure drums] and goge players [one-stringed fiddles].

The way drummers arrange their songs differs from the way that the composers arrange theirs. In the case of the drummers' songs, they are not concerned with composing lines. These lines are a phenomenon they call *ḍa* [lit. son]. This *ḍa* is the line the lead drummer sings before his helpers take up the refrain. If there are many lines it is called *ḍiya* [children]. There is no limit on the length of the *ḍa*. In a particular song the drummer may do a long *ḍiya* and another short one. For example, in

the song that Alhaji Muhammadu Shata made for Ladin Oga there are some places where there are only a few lines in the lead singer's part and other places where his part is quite lengthy. An example of the short *ɗiya* is:

Shata:       Mu tafi kwanar Dangora  
               Let's go stay in Dangora,  
               Don mu ga Ladin Oga  
               So that we can see Ladin Oga.

'Yan amshi: A gai da Ladin Oga  
 (The helpers) To greet Ladin Oga.

An example of the long *ɗiya* is:

Shata:       Nai gargadi gun mata  
               Here's some advice for the women,  
               Matan gari da na kauye  
               City women and village women,  
               Da mai tuwo, domin a ci  
               Those who make tuwo to eat,  
               Da mai tuwon saidawa  
               And those who sell tuwo,\*  
               Ku zo ku bi ni, a baya  
               Come and follow behind me,  
               Mata mu koma, kwana  
               Women let's go and stay there,  
               Ku koyi tuƙin tuwo  
               So you learn how to make tuwo,  
               Ku Koyi gyaran miya  
               So learn how to prepare miya,\*

'Yan amshi: Gidan su Ladin Oga  
 (The helpers) At the house of Ladin Oga and his family.

Aside from this, the drummer's song does not concern itself with an alliterative answer,

\* Types of porridge made from grain and eaten as staple foods.

i.e. the *kafiya*. They finish the *diya* or verse of their songs with any consonant-vowel sequence that they see fit. As for the meter, drummers would say that it is not their intention that their songs follow a recognized *kari* [traditionally *kari* are the meters used in classical Arabic poetry and song]. (3) In other words, if one finds a song in which the drummer is using a particular meter it is not because the drummer intended it that way. For example, the song *Caji* has a particular meter (*Ramal*). (4) Many times one finds repetition in drummers' songs, that is, after a drummer does a certain song, he repeats it. One explanation for this practice is because someone may not have heard what they said previously; or perhaps they need a chance to remember what they are going to say next. The drummer's song does not always begin or end with an opening or closing praise. Another important thing about the arrangement of the drummer's song is how it is sung. If the song wasn't sung well it would not be enjoyable. Because of this, the Hausa say that a song in the mouth of its owner [composer] is the sweetest.

Oral songs are very important to the Hausa. Educated Hausa, uneducated Hausa, and even those who do not understand Hausa are interested in the singing of the song. These kinds of songs make a man happy. Even if he is working, he does not feel tired. They also remind people of the history of their ancestors. Nowadays they help preserve the history and traditional customs of the Hausa. The meter of these kinds of songs helps to warn the public or to inform them about certain matters. They also help to bring a man out of his depression and make him laugh.

In addition to these things, these kinds of songs are also full of wisdom and eloquence. This is what prompts some of those who study the Hausa language to investigate the songs of certain famous Hausa drummers, for example Alhaji Musa Dankwairo and Alhaji Muhammadu Shata. I have to point out that many people are interested in this kind of work. Because of that I have tried to continue with it, although I have looked at it from a different perspective. I have to point out that these kinds of drummers are divided into different groups depending on the kind of people they sing their songs for. And I have to point out that each group has something special which sets it apart from the others. Because of that I begin by dividing them into two groups: the first group is the drummers for the nobility, and the second group is the drummers for the public. The drummers for the public I then divide into three groups. Among them are drummers for the entire public, drummers for different groups of the public, and comic drummers. For each group, I would like to give a short explanation and some examples of the different parts and style of their songs, and describe what differentiates each performing group from the others. This book is intended as an introduction and not an in-depth explanation. My intent is to briefly present these drummers, leaving it to those who are interested to continue the investigation and to correct, confirm, and broaden what I have said. My purpose is to prepare the path for those who are interested in this topic. I hope my work will act as a small light on the path of those who enter this field. May God give me the power to finish it.

I chose to call this book, "Everyone who likes his praises sung must give something," for the Hausa drummers only praise those who give them something or whom they think will give them something in the future. Even those who drum for the nobility, the majority of whom inherited the position of drummer, will leave their place and go to another if their patron stops rewarding them. The end result is that that patron will no longer receive praises even if he inherited the drummers from his parents or grandparents. The drummers for the nobility, not to mention the public drummers who feel they have no specific patron, will take a patron and praise the one who gives them something. If this is really the case, then literally anyone who gives something will be praised.

## NOTES

**Kowa Ya Sha Kida** was printed in Podolbaden: Intec Printers Ltd., 1983.

(1) This kind of term is not mentioned in the histories of Hausa trades. As a case in point, the barbers say that their origin is Medina and that their forbear was the barber of the Prophet. As the story goes, one day while he was shaving him, he [the barber] was about to throw the blood on the ground when he saw that the ground opened up because it wanted to swallow [the blood]. So he went to the wall, but the wall did the same thing. Because of this, the barber drank the blood down himself. This is said to be the origin of the joking between the sharifai [descendants of the Prophet] and barbers. The barbers say he had never tasted anything so sweet.

(2) See **Kano ta Dabo** by Alhaji Abubakai Dokajin Kano, p.27.



(3) That which is meant by meter is called *karin waƙa*. In Arabic it is called *baharu*. The term *baharu* includes verse meters, which are called *tafa'ilun* in Arabic. Most of the kinds of meters used in Arabic songs can be used in the composition of Hausa songs. This is why those who study Hausa songs analyze the songs' meters using the Arabic taxonomy.

(4) *Ramal* is an Arabic song meter which corresponds to the metric line *fa'ilatun fa'ilatun* in Arabic. This kind of meter fits the meter used by the Hausa drummer *Caji*.